

COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools

Contact Tracing in Schools

This school year, public health will continue to prioritize K-12 schools as part of the COVID-19 response.

Contact Tracing

If someone who attends school tests positive for COVID-19, public health follows up with them to learn more about where they were and what they did when they were able to spread COVID-19.

If they were able to spread COVID-19 at school, public health finds out where they were and whom they were at with at school to determine who is a [close contact](#). Public health may also gather information from other people at school. This could be a teacher, education assistant, principal, or other staff.

Being a close contact depends on a few things like how long you were together, how physically close you were, what happened during the interaction, and if protective measures (like spreading people out and wearing a mask) were in place. In schools, close contacts are usually friends or close colleagues. However, sometimes it is a bigger group of people, like an entire class.

Because close contacts are at higher risk, they need to take additional action to help stop COVID-19. Other people at school who are not close contacts are not at increased risk for COVID-19, and do not need to take additional action beyond continuing to follow public health recommendations and orders.

Public health teams work hard to identify and notify all close contacts to help stop the spread of COVID-19. In B.C., most of the people who are identified as close contacts at school do not get COVID-19.

COVID-19 Notifications

We began the year with a focus on notifying students and staff who were close contacts that needed to take action, however, we recognize that the change in the process from last school year caused concern.

Going forward, regional health authorities will resume posting general exposure notifications to their websites when a person (staff or student) attended school while

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infectious, and there is an increased risk of COVID-19 to the groups they were a part of. For most instances, this will be their classroom(s). These notifications will include the name of the school and the date of when a person attended school while they were infectious. Notifications will be posted once communications have gone out to close contacts.

Like last year, close contacts will be contacted directly by public health. Public health will tell them what actions they should take like [self-monitoring](#) for symptoms or self-isolating. Close contacts who are fully vaccinated (i.e., have had 2 doses of COVID-19) have strong protection against COVID-19, and may be asked to self-monitor for symptoms but not self-isolate. This means they can continue to attend school. Close contacts who are not fully vaccinated (including students who are not yet eligible) will be asked to self-isolate.

We know from our experience in B.C. that cases in school reflect cases in the community. Most often COVID-19 is acquired in households or other social settings, like birthday and dinner parties. With multiple layers of protection in place within K-12 schools, most exposures do not spread to other students and staff.

The best way to prevent COVID-19 in schools is for everyone eligible to get two doses of COVID-19 vaccine. This protects not just them, but also the broader school community including younger children who are not yet able to get vaccinated. We know the vaccines work and are the best tool to put the pandemic behind us.

Public health monitors all cases of COVID-19 that impact schools and will continue to offer guidance and recommendations.

Find information about COVID-19 from the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#).

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BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

The timing of each step may vary. This can be due to differences in the time it takes someone to develop symptoms after exposure, when someone gets tested, the number of cases being managed by public health, and the information available to public health through contact tracing.



Day 0

Nancy unknowingly exposed to COVID-19 outside of school.



Day 3

Nancy feels fine and has no symptoms. She attends school but may be able to spread COVID-19 to others.



Day 4

Day 5

Nancy develops symptoms and stays home.



Day 6

Nancy takes a symptom self-assessment and gets a COVID-19 test.

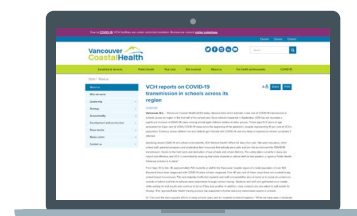


Days 7 +

Health authority is notified of Nancy's positive test result and contacts her.

Health authority interviews Nancy. They discover Nancy may have been able to spread COVID-19 at school.

Health authority contact traces to find out who Nancy's close contacts are at school.



Days 7 +

Health authority notifies Nancy's close contacts by phone or letter. Close contacts will need to self-monitor for symptoms. Those who are not fully immunized may also need to self-isolate.

Notifications will be posted on the health authority website when there is an increased risk to a class or school. Additional school community notifications may also be sent.